AN

ANSWER

OF A

LETTER

From a

Gentleman in Fife,

TO A

NOBLEMAN.

CONTAINING

A brief Acccount of the Barbarous and illegal Treatment, theſe poor Women accuſed of Witchcraft, met with from the Baillies of *Pittenweem* and others, with ſome few Obſervations thereon.

To which is added

An Account of the horrid and Barbarous Murder, in a Letter from a Gentleman in *Fife*, to his Friend in *Edinburgh*, *February 5th.* 1705.

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An Answer of a Letter from a Gentleman in Fife, *&c.*

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MY LORD,

I Reckon my self very much honoured by your Lordships Letter, desiring me to write you an Account of that horrible Murder committed in *Pittenweem*; I doubt not, but by this time, your Lordship has seen the Gentleman's Letter to his Friend thereanent: I refer you to it, the Author thereof being so well inform'd, and so ingenuous, that I'll assure you there is nothing in it, but what is generally talk'd, and believed to be true.

All I can contribute to your Lordship's further Information, shall be by way of a brief Narrative of the Baillies and Minister's unwarrantable imprisoning, and barbarous treating of the Poor Women.

I need not write your Lordship a Character of *Patrick Morton*, being now sufficiently known for a Cheat.

It was upon his Accusation allennarly the Minister and Baillies imprisoned these poor Women, and set a Guard of drunken Fellows about them, who by pinching and Pricking some of them with Pins and Elsions, kept them from sleep for several Days and Nights together; the Marks whereof were seen by severals a month thereafter; this cruel Usage made some of them learn to be so wise, as acknowledge every Question that was ask'd them; whereby they found the Minister and Baillies well pleas'd, and themselves better treated.

Nothwithstanding of all this, some of the more Foolish, continued, as the Minister said, hardened in the Devil's Service, such as *White*, *Jack*, *Wallace*, *Patrick*, and others: All which, save the first, were ordered to the Stocks, where they lay for several Weeks.

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All this, while *Patrick Morton*'s melancholly Fancy (to give it no harsher Term) being too much encouraged by severals, and particularly by the Minister's reading to him the Case of *Barrengarran*'s Daughter, continued roving after a wonderful manner, accusing for his Tormenters, some of the most considerable Mens Wives in the Town, but such as the Minister and Baillies durst not venture to imprison. By this your Lordship may see, it was only the weakest that went to the Walls.

My Lord *Rothes* accompanied with several Gentlemen of good Sense and Reputation, came to *Pittenweem*, where finding these poor Women's Confessions nowise satisfying, and *Patrick Morton* a Cheat, informed the Privy Council thereof, who sent an Order to send *Patrick* over to them.

This Turn being given; and *Patrick* finding, that things were not likely to go so favourably with him as he before fancied, began to draw to his Breeches; and in a short time recovered his former Health, in which he still continues. By this time the Baillies began to be as earnest in emptying their Prisons, as ever they were forward in filling them: So after a long and serious Deliberation, they set them at Liberty: But that their last Step might be as illegal as their first, obliged each of them to pay the Town-Officer, the Sum of 8 *lib. Scots*: To pay which, some of them were forced to sell some Linnen they had reserved for their Dead-Shirts and Wynding-Sheets.

I beg your Lordships further Patience a little to read these few following Observations. *Obs.* 1st. The Baillies and Minister sent and brought severals of these Women from Places without their Jurisdiction; one from *Anstruther*, and another from the Country at 6 Miles distance.

Obs. 2d. What Good could the Minister propose to *Patrick Mortoun* by reading to him the Book Intituled, *The Case of* Barrangarran's *Daughter.*

Observ. 3d. After so much Unjustice done these poor Women, the Baillies and Ministers obliged them to pay the Town-

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Officer eight Pounds *Scots*, is worthy of your Lordſhips, and the reſt of the Lords of the Privy Council's Conſiderations: And it would be the height of Charity, to fall on a method to oblige the Miniſter and Baillies to refound it ſeven-fold.

Obſ. 5th. One *Thomas Brown* the only Man accuſed by *Patrick Mortoun*, and impriſon'd by the Miniſter and Baillies, after a great deal of hunger and hardſhip, died in Priſon. So as this poor Womans Murther was not the firſt, neither will it be the laſt, unleſs by ſevere Puniſhments prevented.

Obſ. 5th. The Baillies in a manner juſtified theſe two Murthers by their not allowing them Chriſtian Burial, bnt burrying them like dogs, ſcarce covered them from the ravens.

Obſ. 6th. You may wonder why all along I ſhould ſay the Miniſter and Baillies? The reaſon is, becauſe during all this Narrative he exercis'd more of the Civil Authority than any of the Baillies, and ſo continues to do, as you may ſee by this following late Inſtance.

The Baillies of *Pittenweem* being conveen'd before the Lords of Privy-Council on the 14th or 15th of *February*, I am inform'd, gave in to them a ſubſcrived Account of the Murther; and to juſtify themſelves, aſſert they had impriſon'd ſeverals of the Murtherers before they left *Pittenweem*. It is very true they did ſo, but they were not long from the Town, when the Miniſter ſet them at liberty: This I think is exerciſing the Office of a Civil Magiſtrate. Perhaps the Miniſter may ſay, he did it by the Magiſtrat's Order left behind them; then I think the Magiſtrats were mightily in the wrong to give in to the Lords of the Privy-Council an Account they knew to be falſe.

My Lord, This is not the tenth part of what may be ſaid upon this Subject; I hope ſome other Perſon will be more particular.

I am,

MY LORD,

Your Lordſhips moſt humble Servant.

An Account of an horrid and barbarous Murder, in a Letter from a Gentleman in Fife, *to his Friend in* Edinburgh.

SIR,

I Doubt not of your being exceedingly Surpriz'd with this ſhort and Juſt Account I give you, of a moſt Barbarous Murder committed in *Pittenweem* the 30*th.* of *January* laſt. One *Peter Morton* a Blackſmith in that Town, after a long Sickneſs, pretended that Witches were Tormenting him, that he did ſee them and know them: And from time to time, as he declared ſuch and ſuch Women to be Witches, they were by Order of the Magiſtrats and Miniſters of *Pittenweem*, apprehended as ſuch, to a very conſiderable Number, and put into Priſon. This Man by his odd Poſtures and Fits, which ſeem'd to be very Surprizing at firſt, wrought himſelf into ſuch a Credit with the People of that Place; that unleſs the Earl of *Rothes*, our Sheriff, had diſcover'd his Villany, and diſcouraged that Practice, God knows how Fatal it might have prov'd to many Honeſt Families of Good Credit and Reſpect. Sir, However, at firſt many were deceived, yet now all Men of Senſe are aſham'd for giving any Credit to ſuch a Perſon. But how hard it is to Root out bad Principles once Eſpous'd by the Rabble; and how dangerous a Thing it is to be at their Mercy, will appear by the Tragical Account I give you of one of theſe poor Women *Janet Corphat*.

After ſhe was committed Priſoner to the Tolbooth, upon a Suſpicion of her being a Witch: She was well guarded with a Nmuber of Men, who by Pinching her, and pricking her with Pins, kept her from Sleep many Days and Nights, threatning her with preſent Death, unleſs ſhe would confeſs her ſelf Guilty of Witch-craft, which at laſt ſhe did. This Report ſpreading abroad, made People curious to Converſe with her upon the Subject, who found themſelves exceedingly diſappointed. The Viſcount of *Primroſe* being in *Fife* occaſionally, inclin'd to ſatisfy his Curioſity in this matter, the Earl of *Kellie*,

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my Lord *Lyon*, the Laird of *Scot's-Tarvat*, and the Laird of *Randerſton* were with his Lordſhip in *Pittenweem*. Three of the Number went to the Tolbooth and Diſcours'd her, to whom ſhe ſaid, that all that ſhe had confeſſed, either of her ſelf, or her Neighbours, were Lies, and cry'd out, *God forgive the Miniſter*, and ſaid he had beat her one day with his Staff, when ſhe was telling him the Truth. They ask'd her how she came to ſay any thing that was not true; she cry'd out, *Alas, alas, I behoved to ſay ſo, to pleaſe the Miniſter and the Baillies*: And in the mean time, she beg'd for Chriſt's Sake not not to tell that she had ſaid ſo, elſe she would be murdered. Another time, when the Laird of *Glenagies* and Mr. *Bruce* of *Kinroſs*, were telling her, she needed not deny what they were asking her, for she had confeſſed as much as would infallibly burn her; she cried out, God forbid! And to one of the two she ſaid, that from which he might rationally conclude, she inſinuat she had Aſſurance from the Miniſter, her Life should not be taken.

A little before Harveſt, Mr. *Ker* of *Kippilaw* a Writter to the Signet being in *Pittenweem*, Mr. *Robert Cook* Advocat went with him to Priſon to ſee this poor Woman; Mr. *Cook* among other Queſtions ask'd her, if she had not renounced her Baptiſm to the Devil; she anſwered, she never renounc'd her Baptiſm but to the Miniſter. Theſe were her Words, what she meant by them, I know not. The Miniſter having got Account of this from Mr. *Cook*, he ſent for her, and in preſence of Mr. *Cook* and Mr. *Ker* in the Church, he threatned her very ſeverely, and commanded the Keeper to put her into ſome Priſon by her ſelf under the Steeple, leſt (as he ſaid) she should pervert thoſe who had confeſſed. The Keeper put her into a Priſon in which was a Low Window, out of which it was obvious that any body could make an eſcape, and accordingly she made her eſcape that Night.

Next Day when they miſs'd her, they made a very ſlight Search for her, and promiſed ten pound *Scots* to any Body that would bring her back.

Mr. *Gordon* Miniſter of *Leuchars*, hearing ſhe was in his Parish,

Pariſh, 8 Miles diſtant from *Pittenweem*, cauſed apprehend her, and ſent her Priſoner, under Cuſtody of two Men, on the 30th of *January*, to Mr. *Cowper* Miniſter of *Pittenweem*, without giving any Notice to the Magiſtrates of the Place. When ſhe came to Mr. *Cowper*, ſhe ask'd him if he had any thing to ſay to her? he anſwered, No. She could get Lodging in no Houſe, but with one *Nicolas Lawſon*, one of the Women that had been called Witches. Some ſay a Baillie put her there.

The Rabble hearing ſhe was in Town, went to Mr. *Cowper*, and ask'd him what they ſhould do with her? He told them he was not concern'd, they might do what they pleaſed with her. They took Encouragement from this, to fall upon the poor Woman, thoſe of the Miniſter's Family going along with him, as I hear; they fell upon the poor Creature immediatly, and beat her unmercifully, tying her ſo hard with a Rope that ſhe was almoſt ſtrangl'd; they dragg'd her through the Streets, and alongſt the Shoar by the heels. A Baillie hearing of a Rabble near his Stair, came out upon them, which made them immediatly diſappear. But the Magiſtrates tho' met together, not taking Care to put her into cloſs Cuſtody, for her Safety, the Rabble gathered again immediatly, and ſtreach'd a Rope betwixt a Ship and the Shoar, to a great height, to which they ty'd her faſt; after which they ſwing'd her to and fro, from one ſide to another, in the mean time throwing Stones at her from all Corners, until they were weary: Then they loos'd her, and with a mighty Swing threw her upon the hard Sands; all about being ready in the mean time to receive her with Stones and Staves, with which they beat her moſt cruelly; her Daughter in the time of her Mother's Agony, tho ſhe knew of it, durſt not adventure to appear, leſt the Rabble had us'd her after the ſame manner, being in a Houſe, in great Concern and Terror out of Natural Affection for her Mother: (About which the Author was miſinform'd in the firſt Edition.) They laid a heavy Door upon her, with which they preſt her ſo ſore, that ſhe cried out, to let her up for *Chriſt*'s ſake, and ſhe would tell the Truth: But when they

they did let her up, what she [illegible] could not satisfy them; and therefore they again laid on the Door, and with a heavy weight of Stones on it, prest her to Death: And to be sure it was so, they called a Man with a Horse and a Sledge, and made him drive over her Corp backward and forward several times. When they were sure she was killed outright, they dragged her miserable Carcass to *Nicolas Lowson*'s House, where they first found her.

There was a Motion made to treat *Nicolas Lowson* after the same manner immediately: But some of them being wearied with three Hours Sport, as they called it, said, It would be better to delay her for another Day's Divertisement; and so they all went off.

It is said, That Mr. *Cowper*, in a Letter to Mr. *Gordon*, gave some Rise to all this: And Mr. *Cowper*, to vindicate himself, wrote to Mr. *Gordon*; whose Return says, if he were not going to *Edinburgh*, he would give him a Double of his Letter. It's strange, he sent him not the Principal. In the Postscript he assures him, he shall conceal it to Meeting.

'Tis certain, that Mr. *Cowper* preaching the Lord's Day immediately after in *Pittenweem*, took notice of the Murder, which at least makes him guilty of sinful Silence. Neither did Mr. *Gordon*, in his Letter to Mr. *Cowper*, make any Regrate for it: And this some construe to be a Justifying of the horrid Wickedness in both.

We are perswaded, the Government will examine this Affair to the bottom, and lay little Stress upon what the Magistrates or Minister of *Pittenweem* will say to smooth over the Matter; seeing it's very well known, that either of them could have quash'd the Rabble, and prevented that Murder, if they had appeared zealous against it.

I am sorry I have no better News to tell you. God deliver us from those Principles that tend to such Practices.

I am

SIR,

Your Humble Servant.

Mr. *Gordon* Minister of [illegible]

Parish,